



# News & Views

UNITED COMMUNITY CORPORATION

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1

WINTER, 1977

## Nellie Grier Finds The Forgotten Ones

Instead of thinking about going to a senior citizen center, Nellie Grier, who will be 77 this year, is running one. And it is a senior citizen center with a difference.

It is specifically designed for those nobody else takes—people who are handicapped in one way or another. Among the 25 clients (the official count—Mrs. Grier always manages to sneak in a few more) who currently attend the Emanuel Senior Citizens Day Care Center at 228 Chancellor



Avenue, for example, is one who had been in a mental institution for 25 years. Another is a blind woman with no relatives. Three are in wheel chairs. Another hadn't been out of the house for five years except to go to the doctor. And one isn't even a senior citizen; he is a retarded young man of 34. He is the youngest; the oldest is a woman of 94.

Mrs. Grier's service to others started long ago in Georgia when she was a sharecropper's daughter, one of 12 children. Her compassion for others may stem from having seen, when she was five, two black men tied to a stump, and burned alive. While still a child, she organized a group of youngsters to go every night to help shell a sick farmer's peanuts, so that his family could plant next year's crop. But there was little time for volunteer activities. From dawn to dusk, children were needed in the fields, and schooling was sporadic. Yet determination got her through high school, and she almost became a nurse, until a broken marriage left her in Florida with

six children to support. Near Miami, in 1942, she started what may have been the first day-care center for black children in the country.

She came to Newark in 1954 as a dressmaker and was soon active in the Order of the Eastern Star, helping others. In 1966, she began working as an aide at a senior citizens' center and within six years became director of the Fuld Neighborhood Center. It was there the idea of a center for handicapped older people came to her. Every morning for two years, she had escorted a handicapped woman to the center. "If we can do it for one," she thought, "surely we can for more."

She approached the city's manpower planning board, suggesting the jobs such a center could generate, and in time the board sent her two young men to help draft a formal proposal and "put in the do's and don'ts, the can's and can'ts, the maybes and the must's." By the fall of 1975, the center was a reality, funded at \$92,000 its first year (now up to \$99,000). The money provides a hot meal at noon for the 25 handicapped people who come from 8:30 a.m. until 3 p.m. each weekday, pays for a van and driver (who lifts many in and out of the bus), and covers the salaries for an assistant, a secretary, a practical nurse, a social worker, two part-time drivers, and four part-time aides who are senior citizens themselves.

How does she find such clients, most of whom were hidden away behind locked doors? By walking the streets and knocking on doors. "You can't find them if you're sitting behind a desk."

There is little time for sitting in Nellie Grier's life. She recently was elected to the UCC board as a vice president. But her prime concern is to find more shut-ins, and bring them to the center on a three-month rotation basis. For she knows first-hand what breaking the cycle of loneliness and despair for the handicapped—and replacing it with friendships, food, and hope—can mean.

## Rx for Doctors Home Service

For once, the poor of Newark have something that the rich can't get—doctors making house calls.

At present, some 40 people a night have been calling 623-5100, the line that reaches Doctors Home Service at 14 Park Place, where